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Lone Wolf Race Warriors and White Genocide

Mattias Gardell

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ABSTRACT: When Brenton Tarrant live-streamed his massacre of fifty-one Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019, he was but one in a series of lone-acting white men committing violent crime to further the radical white nationalist aim to save the white race from extinction and establish a white ethnostate. From where did white nationalists get the notion of an ongoing white genocide? Why should “resistance” against a perceived invasion of “white” territory be launched by individual “lone wolves” massacring noncombatants they have no prior relation to? How could slaughtering children be construed as a heroic act that a perpetrator wants to broadcast to the world?

Based on a unique collection of interviews with lone wolves, their victims, and their supporters, and a close reading of lone wolf, fascist, and radical nationalist material and communication, this Element provides solid answers to these and adjacent questions of importance.

KEYWORDS: lone wolf, fascism, political violence, radical nationalism, violent racism

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1 The Wolves are Coming to Fight

His heart pounded as he hid behind the steel fire door that led from the top floor of the housing complex up to the attic. It was early in the morning, and it would be one of those bright summer days with high blue skies. Birds were singing and he could hear the sound of people waking up in their apartments beneath and around him. Water going through the pipes; people showering, brewing coffee, making breakfast, doors opening, the elevator going up and down. He held the Glock close to his chin, using both hands; barrel pointing upwards, silencer on. Breathing slowly and deeply, listening for one of the doors to any of three apartments of the floor he was at to open. Normally, he never was in this part of the city of Malmö. Thirty-one-year-old Peter Mangs did not know any of the residents, nor did he want to. He only knew they had foreign-sounding surnames, one of them Muslim. He wanted their death, not their friendship.

Mangs heard the sound of a door opening. His heart skipped a beat. “Bingo!” he thought, as he raised his gun between the surprised eyes of the old man in front of him, “the Muslim.” Kooros Effatian was a retired customs officer born in Teheran who had fled his country to escape the Islamic Revolution. Mangs did not know that, neither did he ask. To him, the man was Muslim, and today he would die. “The lifeboat is full. We can have no more people in this country,” Mangs thought, paraphrasing Finnish eco-fascist Pentti Linkola.¹ The very “survival of the [white] gene-pool is threatened.” It was June 13, 2003, and the world would never be the same again. He was “programmed to solve all problems.” Mangs squeezed the trigger. “Give war a chance.”²

Dressed as a police officer, thirty-three-year-old Anders Behring Breivik got help carrying off his heavy bags, loaded with guns and ammo, as the ferry landed at Utøya island in idyllic Lake Tyri, northwest of Oslo. One and a half hours earlier, Breivik had detonated a homemade bomb at the government headquarters in downtown Oslo, killing eight people and wounding 209. He now killed the camp organizer and the

¹ Mangs, Interview, June 17, 2014; [Linkola, 2011](#).

² Mangs, *German Philosophy*, n.d.

security guard on the wharf and walked toward the old main house on the island. He summoned the young adults assembled there for the yearly Labor Youth Utøya Summer Camp; “I came here to protect you.” As the boys and girls flocked around him, Breivik brought out his Ruger Mini-14 and Glock 34 and began shooting the youngsters, one by one, systematically, smiling, enjoying himself. Some teenagers ran off; others froze in panic, unable to move even when the killer stopped to reload his guns. Breivik recalls walking around the island, looking for kids hiding in the woods, behind rocks, down by the shores, or throwing themselves in the water, all the while listening to “Lux Aeterna” by Clint Mansell on his iPod, the evocative violin-led hymn played during the battle scenes in *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. It took an hour and a half. He killed sixty-nine youths that summer day, July 22, 2011, and wounded forty-one, including eighteen who were hospitalized in critical condition. Breivik was proud of himself. His only regret was that he did not kill more traitors to stop the ongoing genocide on the “indigenous (white) peoples of Europe,” as explained in his 2083: *A Declaration of European Independence*, which he had mailed to select recipients earlier that morning.³

“Well lads,” twenty-eight-year-old Brenton Tarrant wrote on 8chan’s “pol” board, where a community of alt-right people gather, on March 15, 2019, “it’s time to stop shitposting and time to make a real-life effort post. I will carry out an attack against the invaders, and will even live stream the attack via Facebook. The Facebook link is below, by the time you read this I should be going live.”⁴ He mounted a camera on his helmet and drove down to the local Christchurch mosque to the tones of a Serbian song celebrating genocide on Muslims: “The wolves are coming to fight.”⁵ Cheering spectators sitting by their computers across the world followed Tarrant into the mosque from the perspective of a first-person-shooter video game, seeing the enlarged barrels of the shotgun and the people encountered and shot in the rooms and hallways of the building. Tarrant took fifty-one lives and wounded another fifty-six that day – men, women, and children.

³ Breivik, Interview, June 19, 2014; Breivik, 2011, pp. 967, 1033f, 1121, 1130, 1353f.

⁴ Tarrant, Facebook Live stream, 2019b. ⁵ Tarrant, Facebook Live stream, 2019b.

Malmö, Sweden, 2003; Oslo, Norway, 2011; Christchurch, New Zealand, 2019. Three armed white men killing people whose names they did not know, yet who they defined as invaders, traitors, polluters. All three saw themselves as heroes risking their lives in defense of their nation, although their targets were all unarmed civilians. The neighbors, friends, and colleagues of Mangs, Breivik, and Tarrant were stupefied when hearing the news. They had found them polite and tidy, never having expressed extremist views. The investigations showed they all had adopted the same tactics described in white nationalist literature and known as *leaderless resistance*, and had learned to avoid advance detection by melting into the general population. Though they had never met, they saw themselves as part of the same “resistance,” sharing tactics, political views, references, myths, and visions. “Lone” perpetrators of this kind are not “alone” other than operationally.

Such performative acts of weaponized whiteness do not only target the individuals they happen to kill, but the communities of racialized others their victims were forced to represent by being killed. None of the killers knew their victims personally. They knew only what their victims represented to them: worthless life that had to die for valuable life to prosper. The murders were political, meant to amplify existing tensions in society, to ignite the apocalyptic race war through which the white nation would be born anew.

While years apart, the killings in Malmö, Oslo, and Christchurch were not isolated, but part of a series of lethal assaults similar in style and motivation perpetrated across the global North. In fact, this kind of political violence has been sufficiently commonplace to award the individual racist attacker their own epithet within the milieu of white radical nationalism: “lone wolf”, a metaphor loaded with romantic notions of the potency and lethality of the free-roaming outcast, suiting the hero politics idealized in the milieu.

It has become part of the pattern for perpetrators of lone wolf violence to explain their cause in writings and/or videoclips.⁶ Breivik saw July 22, 2011 as a “marketing operation” for his 1,571-page 2083 manifesto.⁷ Similarly,

⁶ Nilsson, forthcoming, 2021. ⁷ Breivik, 2011, p. 16.

Tarrant posted his own manifesto, *The Great Replacement*, minutes before the attack, a call to arms to stop the alleged genocide of white people worldwide.

Like Breivik, Tarrant calculated that the more shocking and appalling his violent attack, the greater the attention he would receive. Thus, in the section of *The Great Replacement* in which he interviews himself – another detail he took from Breivik – Tarrant asks himself, “Children are always innocent, do you not think you are a monster for killing an innocent?” “No,” he responds. “Children of invaders do not stay children, they become adults and reproduce, creating more invaders to replace your people.” In Tarrant’s mind, slaying children becomes the noble thing to do. “Any invader you kill, of any age, is one less enemy your children will have to face. Would you rather do the killing, or leave it to your children?”⁸

How did we get here? From where did white nationalists get the notion of an ongoing white genocide happening on their watch? How did they come to the conclusion that “resistance” against a perceived invasion and occupation of “white” territory should be launched by individual “lone wolves” performing ghastly massacres on noncombatants with whom they had no prior relation? How come slaughtering innocent children is construed as a heroic act that a perpetrator wants to broadcast to the world?

The answers will be sought by following the trail of the lone wolf in the political landscape of white nationalism. In so doing, I will proceed from the approach of “methodological empathy,” as developed by Roger Griffin within the field of Fascism Studies.⁹ In seeking to understand a Peter Mangs, an Anders Behring Breivik, or a Brenton Tarrant, it is not enough to run a LexisNexis search or to rely on intelligence reports, court proceedings, the accounts of their victims, or assessments by reporters and political opponents. To understand fascists, it is necessary to engage with them and the material they produce and are inspired by.

This Element builds on four categories of material: first, ethnographic material produced during fieldwork among white nationalists, interviews with lone wolves, including Peter Mangs and Anders Behring Breivik, and conversations with people who see their deeds as heroic; second, material

⁸ Tarrant, 2019a, p. 22. ⁹ Griffin, 2008.

produced by lone wolves themselves, including their manifestos, books, statements, social media postings, live streams, and films, and the literature and people they refer to and were inspired by; third, court proceedings, police investigations, and testimonies; finally, secondary sources, including media reports and previous studies of white nationalism, fascism, and political violence.

Contested Concepts

Words are not innocent. The concepts we use open up the way we think about certain issues, and simultaneously close or obscure other ways of understanding that which we have before us. In what follows, I will discuss why and how I use certain key concepts in this Element: nation/nationalism/radical nationalism, fascism, accelerationism, and ethnopluralism.

The concept of “radical nationalism” is used to name a *political landscape* that encompasses a wide variety of overlapping and not infrequently competing political traditions, including national socialism, populist nativism, alt-right, deep right, fascism, eco-fascism, occult fascism, identitarianism, radical traditionalism, tribal socialism, and national bolshevism, all of which are open to different and instable interpretations that may spur further schismatic divisions.

While most radical nationalist movements tend to be small and transitory, the landscape itself is still there, kept alive by publications, political philosophies, artworks, music, and by the narratives and legends of triumph, challenges, and grievances, which revolve around the polyvalent notions of nation, tradition, and race.

Radical nationalist leaders frequently lay emphasis on the differences between their respective parties, philosophies, and approaches, such as highlighting the contrasts between competing national socialist parties, the distinctions between radical traditionalism and national bolshevism, and the dissimilarities between those who by principle or tactics participate in parliamentary elections and those who do not.

Irrespective of how important these distinctions are to diehards, who may even brand those of other factions traitors, scores of rank-and-file tour the landscape to visit its various sites, not least online; people in leading

positions suddenly break off to form new groups or switch alliances, and most sympathizers will probably spend most of their time unorganized, while generally sympathetic to important parts of the white nationalist landscape, if not of everything that goes on.

The *nations* for which they fight are not necessarily the same as the nations of the actually existing nation-states. A Swedish radical nationalist may fight to save a “nation” defined as Swedish and/or Nordic, European, Western, and White, or engage in a separatist project to carve out a piece of contemporary Sweden (e.g., Scania, Jämtland, Norrland) as an independent nation. While centering on the particular nation they hold uniquely theirs, radical nationalists may recognize, celebrate, and support each other across national borders, as illustrated by Narendra Modi and Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán and Benjamin Netanyahu, publicly embracing each other and forging transnational links of nationalist solidarity.

A nation may be founded on blood, territory, creed, divine intervention, or a combination thereof, but is always exclusionary, albeit to some extent open to accept outsiders under certain conditions. To a radical nationalist, the nation is of overarching importance, the very “root” of human existence. A human without a nation is a rootless being fleeting aimlessly in a sea of meaninglessness.

In nationalist imagination, a nation is a transhistoric entity of organic solidarity with a specific essence that nationalists hold uniquely theirs. More than the sum of its inherent qualities, the nation is something that nationalists “believe in” and bestow with certain “rights,” such as the rights of autonomy, prosperity, and self-determination in a territory of its own, typically called its “home” – objectives a radical nationalist is obliged to fight, kill, and die for.

A “nation” is an “imagined community,” involving feelings of solidarity with people of the same nation, despite the fact that we will never meet or know more than a fraction of those compatriots during our lifetime.¹⁰ The fact that we actually may identify with people who to us are anonymous and who may be living in places we have never heard of, or those who are dead or yet unborn, as long as they “belong” to the same “nation,” tells us not to

¹⁰ Andersen, 1991.